

Market seeks grant from Golden Leaf

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By DENISE BECKER, Staff Writer

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HIGH POINT -- Furniture market organizers are asking for \$250,000 in tobacco trust funds to help publicize the semiannual event.

On behalf of the High Point International Home Furnishings Market Authority Corp., the High Point Economic Development Corp. has submitted a grant application to the Golden Leaf Foundation for money to fund a 12-month marketing campaign. Applications to the Golden Leaf Foundation, which administers the state's tobacco trust fund, must be submitted by a governmental entity or a registered 501(c)3 organization.

"The importance of the market is extraordinary," said Loren Hill, president of the High Point Economic Development Corp. "It is the largest economic event in North Carolina."

The Golden Leaf money would allow the market authority to hire a public relations firm to work on "branding" the furniture market and creating a tag line for the show, said market authority President Judy Mendenhall.

She expects to hear whether they will receive the grant by late fall.

The goal is to increase attendance by buyers, usually representatives of retail furniture stores, by 10 percent by December 2004 and by 30 percent by December 2006. Currently, about 60,000 to 80,000 people attend the furniture market every six months, but the market authority doesn't provide a breakdown of how many are buyers versus exhibitors and other industry officials.

If the grant application is funded, the market authority would also use the \$250,000 to conduct some targeted mailings to retailers and designers who are not coming to market, either because they are unaware of the improvements in parking and transportation that have been made recently or because they aren't aware of all that is offered here, Mendenhall said.

"You always want more buyers," she said. "One of the things we need to do is strengthen the market as best as we can to make sure we retain the jobs that are directly involved in maintaining this market."

The market's application also contains letters of support from N.C. Secretary of Commerce Jim Fain, Guilford County commissioners Chairman Melvin "Skip" Alston, the High Point Chamber of Commerce, the Davidson County Board of Commissioners and the Piedmont Triad Partnership.

"It's a real regional application," Hill said. He said he believes there's a good chance the show will be approved for Golden Leaf funding. "It's up to the (Golden Leaf) committee, of course.

But certainly, the application stands on its own merits. It's too important an event to the state's economy not to get positive consideration."

In addition to Golden Leaf funding, the market authority is also pursuing state and federal funding. It will ask the N.C. Department of Transportation for \$900,000 for each of the next two years to help offset the costs of improvements to the trade show's transportation system.

It is also working with U.S. Rep. Howard Coble's office to obtain federal funding to pay for the costs of infrastructure improvements to the market's transportation hub.

Contact Denise Becker at 336-883-4422, Ext. 241